The Virginia Magazine

OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

VOL. 97 JANUARY 1989 NO. 1

"OUR JOINT LABOR"
W. J. De Renne, Douglas Southall Freeman, and *Lee's Dispatches*, 1910–1915

by WILLIAM HARRIS BRAGG*

LAUDED as "the greatest military biography ever written by or about an American," Douglas Southall Freeman's *R. E. Lee* stands apart, a masterpiece of matchless research, sound conception, and flowing prose. This magisterial study, which "had the extraordinary distinction of being praised by the critics, winning the Pulitzer Prize . . . , and becoming a best seller," is, according to one scholar, not merely the definitive, but also the ultimate, life of Lee. It is difficult to imagine Freeman's four thick volumes ever being supplanted by another Lee biography.[1]

In contrast, Freeman's *Lee's Dispatches* is much less celebrated. The book has been crowded from the shelves by the more compelling *R. E. Lee* and *Lee's Lieutenants*; it is, after all, an edited collection of letters and telegrams, not narrative history. This volume, however, contains some of Freeman's best work—particularly in the excellent introduction and in the masterfully researched notes. Those "qualities of exhaustiveness and

*William Harris Bragg is a public school teacher in Gray, Georgia, and a part-time assistant professor of history at Georgia College.

He wishes to express his deep gratitude for the interest and invaluable assistance of Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek, daughter of Douglas Southall Freeman, and Muriel Barrow Bell, granddaughter of W. J. De Renne. He would also like to thank Thomas E. Camden and the staff of the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, for their courteous help in making accessible the manuscripts upon which this essay was based. Finally, grateful acknowledgment is due to Malcolm Bell, Jr., for valued suggestions and advice, and to F. N. Boney and Stephen Davis, whose comments and recommendations greatly improved the manuscript.

[1]Quoted in Bell I. Wiley, "Lee to Davis, Tactfully," *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 Feb. 1958, section VI, p. 5; A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius* (New York, 1978), p. 182; Richard B. Harwell, introduction to *The Death of Lee*, Emory University Sources and Reprints, series IX, no. 2 (Atlanta, 1955), p. 5. For an opposing viewpoint and an overview of negative critiques of *R. E. Lee*, see Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (New York, 1977), pp. 141–55.

judiciousness which became [Freeman's] hallmark" were already manifest in his first work on Lee. Moreover, the book in one sense represents Freeman's apprenticeship as the general's biographer, for it was from *Lee's Dispatches* that *R. E. Lee* grew.[2]

When Freeman began his labors on the dispatches in 1910, he was in appearance and fame far from what he later became: the legendary Sage of Westbourne, the nation's pre-eminent authority on Confederate history. Instead of that somewhat portly gentleman—bespectacled, bow-tied, and bald—there was a slender, wavy-haired bachelor of twenty-four, working as a Richmond newspaperman and living in the Raleigh Apartments with his recently widowed father, a veteran of Lee's army.[3] Nonetheless, Freeman already bore the distinguished title "Doctor," earned in 1908 at the Johns Hopkins University, and had during the same year broken into print with *A Calendar of Confederate Papers*, an expertly annotated list of the manuscripts and publications held by Richmond's Confederate Museum. For the future, Freeman cherished an ambition to write a history of the Army of Northern Virginia.[4]

In the introduction to his Confederate calendar, Freeman noted that in "connection with military operations, it must not be supposed the *Official Records* contain all the existing material. There are, for example, several gaps in the correspondence there published, notably . . . in the confidential communications to the President from generals in the field. It is perhaps useless to hope that these losses may be recovered, even in part; but occasionally a missing paper is found."[5]

This pessimism was soon proved unfounded, for in the summer of 1910 a distinguished-looking gentleman appeared in Richmond with startling news for Freeman—and an enticing offer as well. The visitor, wealthy bibliophile Wymberley Jones De Renne, owned a leatherbound volume containing over two hundred letters from General Robert E. Lee to

[2]Dumas Malone, "The Pen of Douglas Southall Freeman," in Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography* (7 vols.; New York, 1948–57), VI, xix. The frequency with which *Lee's Dispatches* is cited in *R. E. Lee* attests to the earlier book's value and importance to Freeman (Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* [4 vols.; New York, 1934–35], II–IV).

[3]James J. Kilpatrick, "Douglas Southall Freeman, 1886–1953," commentary to accompany Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee, An Abridgement* . . . , Southern Classics Library (Birmingham, 1982), p. 6; Frank E. Vandiver, "Douglas Southall Freeman, May 16, 1886–June 13, 1953," *Southern Historical Society Papers* (hereafter cited as *SHSP*), LII (1953), vii; Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek to author, 18 Dec. 1985.

[4]Vandiver, "Freeman," p. vii; Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *A Calendar of Confederate Papers* . . . (Richmond, 1908); *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, XVII, 158. An interesting evocation of Richmond in the early 1900s is Henry Sydnor Harrison's *Queed* (New York, 1911). Harrison reportedly based his title character in large part on Freeman (Pocahontas Wight Edmunds, *Virginians Out Front* [Richmond, 1973], pp. 387–88).

[5]Freeman, *Confederate Calendar*, p. 9.

Confederate president Jefferson Davis. Because most of the letters were apparently unpublished, De Renne wanted Freeman to examine them with a view toward preparing them for publication.[6]

A "very strong and striking personality" in his mid-fifties, De Renne had led a richly cosmopolitan life. Though born in Rhode Island, he was a scion of one of Georgia's oldest and most illustrious families and had spent part of his youth at Wormsloe, his ancestral estate on the Isle of Hope near Savannah. Shortly after federal artillery up the coast shook Wormsloe House "from cellar to garret" in 1863, the family "refugeed." De Renne, age ten, and his brothers were spirited through the blockade to safety in Europe. Educated on the Continent, mainly in France and Switzerland (but also in Germany, where he received a dueling scar), De Renne did not return to the United States until the mid-1870s. In 1876 he received his law degree from Columbia University, but he never entered the legal profession.[7]

When De Renne's father died in 1880, the estate was entailed, but the younger De Renne soon skillfully multiplied the proceeds of his annuity into a considerable fortune. By the early 1890s De Renne had spent some time in the North (where he married), traveled world-wide, run a central Texas cattle ranch, and—most happily—lived for a time on France's Atlantic coast at Biarritz, "the queen of resorts and the resort of kings." Nevertheless, the call of his ancestral home became irresistible.[8]

Establishing himself at Wormsloe in 1891, De Renne began gathering rare books and manuscripts, as had his father before him. Despite having no nucleus upon which to build (his father's collection had been destroyed during Sherman's march), the younger De Renne's acquisitions soon surpassed the original library. In 1907 the bibliophile constructed a columned marble temple to house his trove. A "democratic aristocrat," De Renne did not deny these rare papers and publications to researchers; instead, he welcomed "as his guest the humblest individual who showed an interest in Georgia history and desired to avail himself of . . . the library." Wrote one grateful historian, "To his two tables, the one

[6]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 14 June 1910, De Renne Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens. Unless otherwise noted, all manuscript material cited is from this collection.

[7]Leonard L. Mackall, "The Wymberley Jones De Renne Georgia Library," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, II (1918), 73; E. Merton Coulter, *Wormsloe: Two Centuries of a Georgia Family* (Athens, Ga., 1955), pp. 232, 241; *Catalogue of the Wymberley Jones De Renne Georgia Library* . . . (3 vols.; Wormsloe, Ga., 1931), I, xiii–xiv; *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, XVIII, 390–91.

[8]"In Memoriam . . . Wymberley Jones De Renne," *Proceedings of the Seventy-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Georgia Historical Society* (Savannah, 1917), pp. 13–14.

enriched from an ancestral cellar of sherries and madeiras, the other laden at command with manuscripts and rare pamphlets, [De Renne] welcomed friends and students . . . ; and to make his possessions better known to the historical craft he printed two catalogues of his growing library."[9]

By venturing into printing, De Renne again emulated his father, who had issued the Wormsloe Quartos, a series of handsomely produced limited editions containing valuable historical material. The younger De Renne, however, tried to share his books with a wider audience. He brought out Wilson Lumpkin's *Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia* (1907), a two-volume work based upon one of his library's nineteenth-century manuscripts, as well as a short book on the Confederate constitutions (1909). Other of his manuscripts were published by the state of Georgia and by the Georgia Historical Society, of which his father had also been a valued patron.[10]

Although he himself did little historical writing, De Renne took the historian's responsibilities seriously and felt that southern writers particularly needed to set higher standards for themselves. "We in the South," he wrote, "are reproached by Northerners and Europeans of writing history without giving authorities. Consequently, our books are not considered." In Freeman, De Renne found a scholar even more attentive to detail than himself.[11]

Although the influence of De Renne's father seems all-encompassing, it was his mother who was responsible for his keen interest in papers and publications relating to the Confederacy. She had evinced a passion for collecting Confederate imprints and had also purchased manuscripts. Foremost among the latter was the Permanent Constitution of the Confederacy. Perhaps more important, Mary De Renne was deeply devoted to the memory of Robert E. Lee. This veneration was demon-

---

[9]Coulter, *Wormsloe*, pp. 248–49; Mackall, "De Renne Library," pp. 69, 73; "In Memoriam," pp. 14–15; Ulrich B. Phillips, review of *Catalogue of the . . . De Renne Georgia Library*, in *American Historical Review* (hereafter cited as *AHR*), XXXVIII (1932), 174.

[10]Mackall, "De Renne Library," pp. 68–69, 73 n. 16; Coulter, *Wormsloe*, pp. 225–26, 243–45; Allen D. Candler, ed., *Journal of Colonel William Stephens*, supplement to Vol. IV of *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta, 1908), p. iii.

[11]Mackall, "De Renne Library," p. 73 n. 16; W. J. De Renne's undated letter draft written on A. B. Caldwell to W. J. De Renne, 9 Dec. 1907. In the letter to Caldwell, publisher of *Men of Mark in Georgia* (6 vols.; Atlanta, 1907–12), De Renne complained bitterly that the publication had omitted the citations of sources he had included in his sketch of Noble Jones.

Courtesy of the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia

Georgia bibliophile Wymberley Jones De Renne intended the edition of *Lee's Dispatches* to be "a monument to [Lee's] genius and character." The volume was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1915, the same year De Renne sat for this portrait by Gari Melchers.

strated most clearly by an exquisitely bound limited edition of John W. Daniel's famous oration on Lee, which she had printed in 1883.[12]

It was presumably his mother's wide array of Confederate books and pamphlets, however, that linked De Renne to Freeman. Mrs. De Renne's collection had been presented to the Confederate Museum, where Freeman, surveying it for his calendar, pronounced it "the most valuable of the Library." Continuing, he praised its donor: "At a time when Confederate publications were much more numerous and more easily acquired than at present, Mrs. De Renne, with rare judgment, gathered a collection . . . second to none in the country."[13]

So it was to Freeman that De Renne turned when he needed a historian to edit his Lee letters.[14] The young man needed little time to consider the

[12]Coulter, *Wormsloe*, p. 239; John Warwick Daniel, *Robert Edward Lee: An Oration* . . . (Savannah, 1883); *The Savannah Press*, 23 June 1916.

[13]Freeman, *Confederate Calendar*, p. 501. De Renne may also have been familiar with Freeman's "Aristocracy of the Northern Neck" in Samuel Chiles Mitchell, ed., *The South in the Building of the Nation* . . . , X (Richmond, 1909), pp. 63–76.

[14]In 1910 De Renne approached U. B. Phillips regarding the editing job. By this time Phillips had published *Georgia and State Rights* and had been canvassing public and private archives in Georgia for a biography of

proposition. "I assure you," Freeman wrote in mid-June 1910, "that nothing will give me more pleasure than the co-operation in an undertaking which bespeaks so much patriotism on your part and which will be of such great value to the people of the South."[15]

Because of a secretarial error, De Renne's response remained unknown to Freeman until mid-September, by which time his main employment was as "Technical Member and Secretary" of the Virginia Tax Commission. Relieved to find that the mix-up had not led De Renne to make other arrangements, Freeman wrote, "I am yours to command. I can come and examine [the papers] . . . and can push the publication as rapidly as you may desire. Freed at last from the burden of a newspaper life, my time is my own and I can suit my coming to your convenience."[16]

Consequently, the next month Freeman traveled by rail to visit De Renne—not in Georgia, but in New York, where De Renne habitually spent his summers and autumns. While in the North, the Georgian divided his time between Manhattan, where he had a suite at the Hotel Netherland on Fifth Avenue overlooking Saint-Gaudens's heroic equestrian statue of General William T. Sherman, and rural Westport.[17] It was in his vacation home at Westport, on Lake Champlain northeast of Fort Ticonderoga, that De Renne met with Freeman. There, in a setting more evocative of the French and Indian War than the War Between the States, the bibliophile and the historian discussed the Lee project at length. Freeman was impressed by De Renne's rationale for bringing the letters to the public: "altogether apart from what they showed of General Lee's military character, they were worth publishing for the light they threw on the man."[18]

Robert Toombs and a collection of the correspondence of Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb (both published in 1913). Because De Renne simultaneously requested Phillips's opinion of Freeman's suitability as editor, it seems probable that the approach to Phillips was a courtesy. Interestingly (in light of Freeman's later work on the Lee dispatches), Phillips's original submission of the Toombs-Stephens-Cobb correspondence was rejected in 1911 because of "large and serious" deficiencies, among them the lack of a preface and inadequate annotation (U. B. Phillips to W. J. De Renne, 26 Feb. 1910; Merton L. Dillon, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Historian of the Old South*, Southern Biography Series [Baton Rouge and London, 1985], pp. 93, 93 n. 1).

[15]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 14 June 1910.

[16]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 14 Sept. 1910. During the period he prepared the dispatches for publication, Freeman also worked as executive secretary of the Virginia Anti-Tuberculosis Association and as a director of publicity for Virginia's State Board of Health. He returned to journalism in 1913 (*National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, LVIII, 123; *Dictionary of American Biography*, Supplement V, 233–34; Richard B. Harwell, introduction to Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee, An Abridgement* . . . [New York, 1961], p. xiv).

[17]Byron and Grace M. Meyer, *Once Upon a City: New York from 1890 to 1910* (New York, 1958), p. 27; Louise Hall Tharp, *Saint-Gaudens and the Gilded Era* (Boston, 1969), pp. 321–23.

[18]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 8 Oct. 1910, 2 July 1915; S. R. Stoddard, *Lake George and Lake Champlain* (Glens Falls, N.Y., 1889), pp. 84, 95.

Apparently Freeman did not see the book of dispatches until several weeks later, when De Renne stopped in Richmond on his journey homeward to Georgia. The volume he brought was impressive enough in itself, bound in three-quarter morocco with gold tooling on the spine. Packed between the marbled boards was an astonishing cache—over two hundred letters, most in the autograph of Lee, pasted by an edge to the book's leaves. On the inside front cover was the striking armorial bookplate of the former owner, Colonel Charles C. Jones, Jr.—three ostrich plumes surrounded by a coronet. Soon the book was safely stowed in a vault in Richmond's Planters' National Bank.[19]

Only two impediments to commencing the project remained: the Lee heirs had to give their consent to the proposed book, and Freeman needed to canvass the collection to determine if there were enough unprinted letters to make publication worthwhile. Before leaving Richmond, De Renne wrote to Captain Robert E. Lee, Jr., from his suite at the palatial Hotel Jefferson. He advised the captain of his possession of the letters and his desire to publish them "as a monument to [R. E. Lee's] genius and character" that would increase the "worldwide renown of our great general."[20]

Consenting to the project, Captain Lee placed the matter in the hands of Richmond's W. Gordon McCabe, described by Freeman as "the final authority on Confederate history in this part of the world." McCabe's expertise assisted in removing the second barrier to the undertaking. Formerly an artillery officer in the Army of Northern Virginia, McCabe had himself done a great deal of research on Lee's military papers. While examining and organizing Colonel Charles Marshall's huge mass of Lee manuscripts, he had prepared a lengthy checklist of most of the Lee letters in print. His findings had discouraged him from printing his own Lee volume, but his list helped Freeman in assessing the De Renne collection's value and prospects for publication.[21]

Not until early February 1911, however, was Freeman able to report to De Renne on his research. Even with McCabe's list, it had taken "many, many long hours to ransack the printed collections." He had found, however, that of the 242 letters, the majority—136—had not seen print

---

[19]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 27 Oct. 1910; W. J. De Renne to Robert E. Lee, Jr., 28 Oct. 1910; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 6 Feb. 1911.

[20]W. J. De Renne to Robert E. Lee, Jr., 28 Oct. 1910.

[21]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 5 Dec. 1910, 5 Aug. 1915; Armistead Churchill Gordon, *Memories and Memorials of William Gordon McCabe* (2 vols.; Richmond, 1925), II, 406–9; Armistead Churchill Gordon, *William Gordon McCabe: A Brief Memoir* (Richmond, 1920), p. 6.

in the *Official Records* or elsewhere; therefore, they must have been originals that had not survived in copied form. Of these unprinted letters, the most important could be divided into three series: dispatches relating to the Seven Days, the Gettysburg campaign, and the siege of Petersburg.[22]

Freeman confessed disappointment that most of the letters were not original: "I had hoped for better things." Nonetheless, he took consolation in the fact that the unpublished letters had more intrinsic interest than those in the collection that were already in print. Those "which told a thrilling story were the ones which had escaped the previous editors."[23]

It was now for De Renne to decide whether to go forward. Freeman estimated that the unpublished dispatches and the introduction De Renne wished him to write would, "if printed on a large font of type," yield a volume of at least 175 pages. De Renne telegraphed immediate approval, and Freeman wired back that he could think of no reason why "the copy should not be in the hands of the printers very shortly."[24]

The firm involved was Dodd, Mead and Company, publishers of De Renne's book on the Cherokee removal. When De Renne had approached them regarding the Lee volume the previous year, they had expressed themselves "very much interested" and "strongly disposed" toward publication. If they chose to publish the book—which they noted "should be set by a very excellent printer in a most careful manner"—they would stand all expenses and pay De Renne a 10 percent royalty on all books sold.[25]

Upon receiving De Renne's account of his contact with the publishers (and De Renne's desire for "rapid progress"), Freeman responded that he hoped "soon to report the completion of our joint labor." Transcribing five

---

[22]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 6 Feb. 1911. Besides those Lee letters scattered throughout the *Official Records*, there were five other printed sources of the general's correspondence available to Freeman: Robert E. Lee, Jr.'s *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (1904), Fitzhugh Lee's *General Lee* (1894), J. William Jones's *Personal Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Letters of Gen. Robert E. Lee* (1874) and *Life and Letters of Robert Edward Lee, Soldier and Man* (1906), and Allen D. Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, III (1910) (Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, IV, 548–49, 553–54).

[23]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 6 Feb. 1911.

[24]Ibid.; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 11 Feb. 1911. With his 6 February letter, Freeman sent De Renne a copy of W. W. Baker's *Memoirs of Service with John Yates Beall, C.S.N.*, edited by Freeman and including a ten-page introduction by him. "The narrative is simple and the editorial work rudimentary, but it may possibly interest you," Freeman commented. Compared to the exhaustive notes written for *Lee's Dispatches*, the editing is minimal: a few corrections and only seven notes for the sixty-nine-page book (W. W. Baker, *Memoirs of Service with John Yates Beall, C.S.N.*, edited with an introduction by Douglas Southall Freeman [Richmond, 1910], p. 12).

[25]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 13 Feb. 1911; Dodd, Mead and Co. to W. J. De Renne, 1 Nov. 1910, 11 Feb. 1911.

representative dispatches at Dodd, Mead's request, Freeman posted them in early March 1911.[26]

The publisher's response was not encouraging. The transcripts sent, wrote the firm, "disappoint us exceedingly. They seem to us to be merely in the nature of reports and would be technically interesting perhaps to military strategists, but would not . . . appeal to the general public." They hoped that the "bulk of the letters" were more interesting, and Freeman determined to settle their doubts.[27]

By the end of the month all letters had been copied; De Renne would now have a typescript and carbon copy of all his Lee dispatches, both published and unpublished. But Freeman now realized that—because of the "large number of minute and obscure references" in the Lee letters—adequate annotation would require more time than he had imagined. Nonetheless, he hoped to visit Wormsloe for a final conference and bring with him a set of notes that would give a "good index and a significance to the correspondence." Freeman was soon working three or four hours on the papers each night. He had found "some of the most amazing historical puzzles in the General's references" and had "been forced to work these out as best [he] could in detail."[28]

When June arrived Freeman was all but finished comparing copies to the original manuscripts and prepared to send the leatherbound volume back to Wormsloe with a letter explaining the reason for the delay. "The truth of the matter," he wrote, "is . . . that I have never had so difficult a piece of editorial work in my life. The letters are so detailed and refer to so many minor matters that, without copious notes, they are practically a sealed book. On the other hand, to secure the information which will make them easily understood is an enormous task. I have shown parts of the text to a few historical students who agree with me that they must be edited with extreme care to be of value. In some cases I have worked every night for a week on a single letter."[29]

Freeman further noted that more of the letters had been discovered in published works, reducing the total number unprinted from 136 to 125. Surprisingly, however, he had decided that the entire collection should be published, in keeping with De Renne's comment on Lake Champlain "that the whole series presented an incomparable picture of General

[26]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 16 Feb., 7 Mar. 1911.

[27]Dodd, Mead and Co. to Douglas Southall Freeman, 16 Mar. 1911; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 18 Mar. 1911.

[28]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 5, 8, 18, 25 Mar., 5 Apr. 1911.

[29]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 2 June 1911.

Dementi Foster Studio

In *Lee's Dispatches* Douglas Southall Freeman, shown here in a 1916 photograph, already displayed those "qualities of exhaustiveness and judiciousness which became his hallmark" in his biographies of Robert E. Lee and George Washington.

Lee's character and strategy." Because this change would almost double the amount of annotation necessary, Freeman wanted De Renne to stop in Richmond for a discussion on his way north.[30]

When De Renne arrived in mid-June, he brought with him a surprise that would further delay the completion of the project: another bound volume of Lee papers, this one made up entirely of telegrams. Unaccountably, he seems not to have mentioned this volume to Freeman previously, although it was the companion to the letterbook and had been purchased at the same time. De Renne had perhaps discounted its value because fewer of the telegrams (many of which were inscrutably brief) were in Lee's hand.[31]

---

[30]Ibid. As Freeman's research continued, the number of unprinted letters dwindled by publication to 114. One more letter at least (dispatch no. 40, R. E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, 21 Mar. 1863) should have been omitted; it had been printed in the *Official Records* (Joseph H. Harrison, Jr., review of *Lee's Dispatches* [1957 ed.], *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* [hereafter cited as *VMHB*], LXVI [1958], 375).

[31]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 7, 26 June 1911; Robert E. Lee, *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A.; to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of The Confederate States of America, 1862–65, From the Private Collection of Wymberley Jones De Renne of Wormsloe, Georgia. Edited with an Introduction by Douglas Southall Freeman* (New York, 1915), p. xxxv.

When De Renne agreed that his entire Lee collection should be published, Freeman's editing task became further complicated; the 295 telegrams, like the letters, would have to be transcribed and checked against those already in print. Nonetheless, a cursory examination showed Freeman that the telegrams were "valuable, and a few . . . of very great importance."[32]

Working on the telegrams as well as the letters necessarily slowed Freeman's progress, but by the end of August the telegrams were copied. Again the work's conclusion seemed to be in sight. Nevertheless, by the end of the year the project remained unfinished. "Doubtless you think you employed the most worthless man in America," Freeman wrote. For his part, De Renne became impatient for the return of his dispatch volumes, incomparable rarities that he enjoyed sharing with visitors and friends. Near December's end he sent a peremptory telegram directing the return of the Lee books.[33]

After the return of the bound dispatches, there was a long silence from Freeman, unbroken until late April 1912. Having by this time left the tax commission, he hoped to have more time for editing, but he foresaw no early completion date. "While I do not want to alarm you as to the outcome of the Lee publication," Freeman wrote,

> I must tell you that neither of us had any idea of the extent of the undertaking when we began. The telegrams have proved a veritable mine of new truth and with the notes, the whole collection will make two volumes. . . . I was of the opinion that the telegrams would not long detain me, but they offer some very interesting problems which must be solved. I am giving the work the best scholarship of which I am capable and trust to make the finished task worthy of the writer of the letters and of the distinguished owner of them.[34]

There seems to have been no further significant communication between the two until autumn, when Freeman wrote to thank De Renne for some expense money, as well as for his patience. "A less genial gentleman," noted Freeman, "would have been inclined long ago to reject me as a fraud and a delusion." The young historian had good news,

---

[32]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 26 June 1911. Almost 70 percent of the telegrams were already in print; only ninety were published in *Lee's Dispatches*.

[33]Receipt, 17 Aug. 1911; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 11 Dec. 1911; W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 21 Dec. [1911].

[34]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 29 Apr. 1912.

however: everything was "shaping up" in such a way that they were going to have a "great book," probably ready for publication at Christmas.[35]

De Renne hoped that the book could be completed by the end of October, when he was to go back to Wormsloe for the winter. Otherwise, publication would have to be postponed until the summer, when he would return to New York and could meet with the publishers. Such a delay "would be unfortunate," De Renne wrote, "as at present newspapers & magazines are having a 'Lee revival' & people's interest in Lee is aroused for the time."[36]

Freeman could not promise to have the book ready that quickly. Although his work was progressing well, he stressed to De Renne that it would not "do your collection justice to print it until all conflicting editorial difficulties have been settled and the notes are complete. It will soon be ready and I trust will be satisfactory."[37]

Nonetheless, more than a year passed without any word from Freeman. His patience exhausted, De Renne finally wrote Freeman on 4 September 1913, "Please let me know definitely, when the Lee letters I entrusted to you will be ready for publication."[38]

Freeman's response was prefaced by an explanation citing "numerous and repeated setbacks" that had delayed him. "Last October," he wrote, "at a time when I was pushed hard, I was stricken with a form of partial paralysis . . . which incapacitated me for work for a long, long time. . . . I got behind in all my work and in my finances as well. Since recovery, I have been forced to work overtime on those things which brought immediate return and have not been able . . . to finish my work on the Lee papers."[39]

Freeman's mysterious illness was apparently produced by a combination of physical and emotional stress, exacerbated by overwork. From the start of the Lee project, he had complained of crippling rheumatism in his hands, "baffling attacks . . . which threaten . . . to put a permanent end to my investigations." When he later developed a limp as well, Freeman

---

[35]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 30 Sept. 1912.

[36]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 18 Oct. [1912]. One reason for increased press coverage of Lee was Gamaliel Bradford's *Lee the American*, published in 1912 to "great national acclaim" (Connelly, *Marble Man*, p. 120).

[37]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 28 Oct. [1912].

[38]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 4 Sept. 1913.

[39]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 8 Sept. 1913.

consulted several doctors. One diagnosed multiple sclerosis, while another suspected a potentially fatal thrombosis.[40]

Emotionally, Freeman had been deeply anguished by his mother's death from cancer just a year before De Renne first visited him in Richmond. In the words of his daughter, Freeman "was profoundly attached to his mother and her illness shadowed the days between his graduation and the time that she died." Soon after beginning work on the dispatches, he had severed his ties to journalism, an act that—despite his protests to the contrary—must have been unsettling for one who so obviously had gotten "printer's ink into his veins." Although his fiancée, Inez Goddin, was indispensable in helping Freeman get through this dark period, the unwelcome necessity of postponing marriage for financial reasons blocked him from that full partnership that was to be such a stabilizing force in future years.[41]

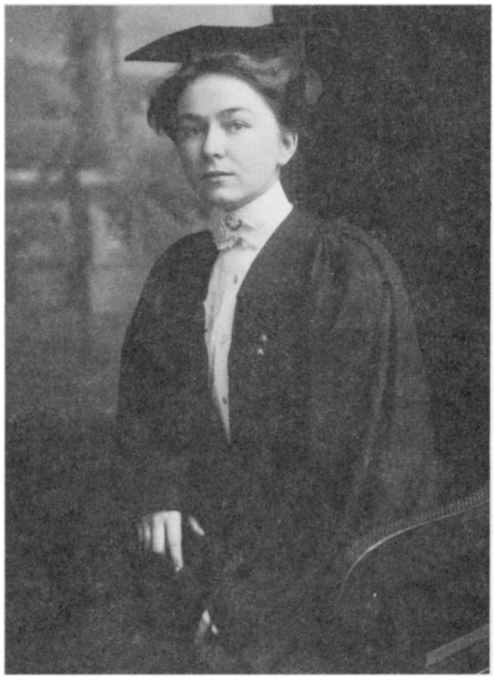
Later Freeman would become famous for his "ruthless rationing of time," his ability to achieve more in less time than seemed humanly possible. Not until the 1920s, however, did he fully work out the rigid systemization that allowed him to channel his energies most effectively. Without that disciplined system and the rest it allowed, Freeman labored so strenuously that he "overstepped the reach of even his prodigious energy" and undermined his health. His symptoms disappeared after he began to get more rest and, perhaps more important, married and came under the serene influence of his wife, who willingly supported his commitment to a demanding work schedule and insulated him from interruptions and distractions.[42]

Despite the problems and delays, Freeman gave De Renne some heartening news: "I am at this time engaged on the final notes for the 1865 letters and when I have had the whole typewritten later in the month, need only compare the copies with the originals once more to be

[40]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 8 Oct. 1910, 6 Feb. 1911, 8 Sept. 1913; Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek to author, 18 Dec. 1985; Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek, "Douglas Southall Freeman: My Father as a Writer," *Richmond Literary and Historical Quarterly*, I (1979), 37.

[41]Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek to author, 21 Apr. 1987; Mary Tyler Freeman Cheek, "Reflections," *VMHB*, XCIV (1986), 28–29, 32; Malone, "Pen of Freeman," p. xiv.

[42]Joseph H. Harrison, Jr., "Harry Williams, Critic of Freeman: A Demurrer," *VMHB*, LXIV (1956), 72; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *Richmond As a Literary Capital* (Richmond, 1966), pp. 15–16; Malone, "Pen of Freeman," pp. xvii–xviii; *DLB*, XVII, 160; Cheek, "Father as Writer," pp. 37–38; "The Virginians," *Time*, 18 Oct. 1948, p. 110. An additional difficulty mentioned by Freeman was lack of permanent access to a set of the *Official Records*. Such a deficiency would not hinder him in future years, when his collection of source materials—"in books and photostats and microfilm"—would have been "envied by any scholar and almost any library" (Malone, "Pen of Freeman," pp. xii, xxv). Freeman's fabled thoroughness and perfectionism no doubt also contributed greatly to the delays.



Freeman intended to visit Wormsloe in early 1914 to check the paragraphing on his typescript and consult with De Renne about his introduction, but his marriage to Inez Goddin (right) in February made the trip impracticable.

Foster Collection, Virginia Historical Society

certain I have made no error." He wondered if he might come to Wormsloe to make the comparisons. "I live in mortal terror of an accident as long as I have those priceless MSS in my possession," he wrote. In closing, he warned De Renne that they must "prepare for a pretty large volume," because the notes, although as brief as he could make them, were "rather extensive."[43]

By the end of September, Freeman again suggested that his "long and onerous though pleasant task" was nearing completion, though he had been somewhat delayed by the *Official Records*'s "habit of placing letters in the most unexpected connection." Again working nightly on the dispatches, he proposed to finish more quickly by omitting those letters and telegrams already published. Although the notes were almost ready to be copied for the printer, Freeman had not yet started on the introduc-

[43]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 8 Sept. 1913. Freeman had good reason to fear losing valuable papers through accident. In September 1908 the bound typescript of his doctoral dissertation, "The Attitude of Political Parties in Virginia Towards Slavery and Secession, 1846–1861," was reduced to a charred fragment by a fire in the university archives. "Fortunately," wrote Freeman, "the original MS was in my possession" (undated note with remnant of the bound typescript, "Secession in Virginia" folder, Container No. 126, Douglas Southall Freeman Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

tion; he wished to discuss its thrust more fully with De Renne before beginning.[44]

De Renne immediately approved the deletion of the published dispatches and enclosed a $250 check to cover current expenses, including the cost of having a Richmond stenographer type the notes. More money was promised when needed. "It is pleasant to think that your work will be soon brought to a happy conclusion," De Renne wrote. "Two of my friends who were most anxious to see the letters are dead & I myself commenced to despair of living to see them published. There is not doubt though that the interest they will create will atone for all delays." Soon he hoped to greet Freeman at Wormsloe for their scheduled conference.[45]

By late October Freeman was working on the dispatches for February 1865 and anticipated completing his introduction and soon viewing the wonders of Wormsloe. "I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed the task now so nearing its end," he wrote. "To work with Lee papers is always a joy; to work with Lee papers belonging to a Mycaenas like yourself is about the Paradise of the historical student."[46]

Finally Freeman reported in mid-January 1914 that his work was almost completed. He found, however, that his typed copies of the dispatches had no notations for paragraphs. Although he had hoped to travel to Georgia, his marriage in early February made the trip impracticable. Would De Renne employ someone to check the copies against the originals and mark all the paragraphs? Freeman asked. De Renne replied that he would, but other delays ensued, and it was early May before the papers arrived.[47]

A letter from Freeman accompanied the package. He sent no notes; those for each dispatch were on separate sheets, and Freeman feared "[t]hey might be confused, with disastrous results." In keeping with their previous decision, he sent none of the published letters, most of which he

---

[44]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 23 Sept. 1913.

[45]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 26 Sept. 1913. Others who would not see the project completed were De Renne's wife of thirty years, who died in 1913, and Robert E. Lee, Jr., dead the next year. De Renne himself, who had major surgery in the fall of 1913, had been advised in October 1912 that he was suffering from diabetes mellitus. Such a diagnosis was an almost certain death sentence in that time before the isolation of insulin (*The Savannah Morning News*, 24 June 1916; certificate of death of Wymberley Jones De Renne, Bureau of Vital Records, New York, N.Y.).

[46]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 24 Oct. 1913. Reference is to Maecenas, a noted patron of letters during the reign of Augustus.

[47]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 18 Jan. 1914; W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 26 Jan., 27 Mar. 1914 (drafts written on Freeman's letter of 18 Jan. 1914); W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 15 Apr. 1914; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 17 Apr. 1914; W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 30 Apr. 1914 (with De Renne's notation that the manuscript was received 4 May 1914).

had already annotated. They could be added if De Renne thought best, but Freeman advised against it. Regarding the bound dispatches, the historian needed De Renne's assistance on an important point. "Please give me your theory, if you have one," Freeman wrote, "as to how these letters came into the possession of Col. Jones."[48]

As illustrations, Freeman suggested facsimile reproductions of "one or two important maps to show the significance of what Lee [wrote]." He left up to De Renne whether to include facsimiles of any dispatches but suggested five as suitable for reproduction. By this time the most conspicuous illustration, the frontispiece, had been chosen. De Renne wished to use William Marshall's engraving of one of Julian Vannerson's photographs of Lee, but Freeman diplomatically suggested another as more appropriate: the full-length photograph of Lee, also by Vannerson, showing the general fully uniformed with sash and sword. Although an excellent photograph would seem preferable to a mediocre engraving, Marshall's "cold and not very successful likeness" was used.[49]

Adding that he was "taking a last whack" at the introduction, Freeman closed by giving De Renne assurances that his "long-taxed forbearance" would suffer no longer from delay. "I shall not let up until the work is done."[50]

Within two weeks, De Renne had arranged for the manuscript to be "carefully paragraphed and corrected" by historian William J. Harden, librarian of the Georgia Historical Society. Although De Renne thought it best to omit the previously published dispatches and viewed letter facsimiles as "not necessary to the value of the book," he believed that maps were essential and directed Freeman to bring to New York those maps he considered most suitable. In regard to the provenance of the letters De Renne wrote, "I do not know how Colonel Jones secured the letters and I see no reason to mention that I bought them from him. You could say if you want that I bought them among others in a collection of MSS of southern military men and statesmen."[51]

In mid-May Freeman requested that the typed dispatches be returned to him for final checking and the insertion of notes. With the introduc-

---

[48]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 1 May 1914.

[49]Ibid.; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 26 June 1911; Roy Meredith, *The Face of Robert E. Lee in Life and Legend* (1947; New York, 1981), p. 46. The dispatches suggested by Freeman for reproduction were those numbered 6, 60, 90, 126, and 204. Freeman used the full-length Vannerson photograph as the frontispiece for the second volume of *R. E. Lee*.

[50]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 1 May 1914.

[51]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 15 May 1914.

tion finished, all was complete "except for a single paragraph or two that are not acceptable to him in their present form"—an apparent reference to the standard of excellence Lee would have expected.[52]

There had never been an opportunity for discussing the introduction, so Freeman summarized for De Renne the principles he had followed. He had sought to show "why letters of General Lee's are important and worthy of publication at this time" and to explain "the new and important evidence" provided by the dispatches. Freeman also wished to stress that the letters were "deemed especially interesting in that they illustrate, adequately but concisely, the splendid character of the great man who wrote them." Further, he wanted to show how Lee's character had continued to develop "in the ordeal of battle." Finally, Freeman intended to "conclude with a brief account of the history of the letters, their preservation, and the method of their presentation."[53]

Although Freeman promised to be finished within a very few days, De Renne by this time was probably not surprised when the interval stretched into several months. Meanwhile, war broke out in Europe, and Freeman, having returned to journalism, found himself even busier than usual. At last, in early September 1914, De Renne's patience was rewarded. "Perhaps you have despaired of ever receiving this letter," Freeman wrote, "but here it is: the papers are finally and completely done, [and] are in the bindery so that they can be forwarded to you in proper form. . . . I hope you will be pleased with the editorial work. I have done 'my durnest' on it and am not ashamed of it."[54]

Freeman shipped this manuscript by express to De Renne in New York, along with a letter explaining in detail the decisions he had made. He noted that in choosing *Lee's Dispatches* as the book's title, he had been inspired by another series of military letters—*Wellington's Dispatches*. Given the importance of Lee's letters, the editor felt the title not "too pretentious." Also, in regard to the title page, he suggested that De Renne, as the owner of the papers, should be given at least as much prominence as the editor.[55]

Realizing that the introduction might be considered too lengthy, Freeman admitted that he had several times tried to shorten it. He was "most anxious not to obtrude the editor's personality or opinions."

---

[52]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 18 May 1914.

[53]Ibid. In describing the dispatches' importance, however, Freeman did stray into hyperbole: he stated that Lee's "every written line was a lesson in war" (*Lee's Dispatches*, p. v).

[54]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 7 Sept. 1914.

[55]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15 Sept. 1914.

Interestingly, however, the only portion he suggested for possible reduction was his discussion "trac[ing] the effect of the war in the trial of General Lee's character." Of course, as Freeman confessed, De Renne had previously stated that the dispatches were "primarily of interest for the picture they presented of the great character of Lee"; therefore, Freeman asserted, those particular paragraphs were "well worth the space," because they brought to the reader's attention the very point that had most impressed De Renne.[56]

In respect to annotation, Freeman drew De Renne's attention to the fact that 90 percent of his citations were to the *Official Records*, a source many criticized as "unscholarly and unscientific." Conceding the shortcomings of the mammoth compilation, Freeman nevertheless weighed in as a champion of the source's great worth. "I thought that the work was of sufficient dignity to merit the citation of the only documents fit to rank with those we print, namely the reports and correspondence in the *Official Records*."[57]

Among the "greatest technical difficulties" in presenting the dispatches, according to Freeman, was the necessity of making "the whole plain to one with no particular knowledge of the war." His solution was to provide a running narrative in the notes that tied together all the letters in the series and provided information on such topics as the Antietam and Fredericksburg campaigns, about which there were few or no unpublished letters in the collection. As Freeman admitted, this method seemed to be the only way to bridge gaps in the correspondence.[58]

In the typescript Freeman gave each dispatch in full, including the endorsement, and marked line endings to give an idea of the format of the manuscripts. The endorsements, Freeman suggested, should be retained if space were not "a paramount consideration." He admitted, however, that the perpendicular symbols for the line endings tended to "break the page in an ugly fashion" and could be omitted without loss. They were.[59]

---

[56]Ibid. Referring to the growth of Lee's character during the ordeal of war, Freeman wrote, "Noble he was; nobler he became" (*Lee's Dispatches*, p. xix).

[57]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15 Sept. 1914; *Lee's Dispatches*, p. iv. Of the two dozen or so additional sources used, Freeman commended particularly three books: of the Lee biographies, Robert E. Lee, Jr.'s *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (New York, 1904); of the accounts by Lee's lieutenants, E. P. Alexander's *Military Memoirs of a Confederate* (New York, 1907); and, of "secondary authorities," G. F. R. Henderson's *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War* (London and New York, 1898) (*Lee's Dispatches*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv).

[58]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15 Sept. 1914; *Lee's Dispatches*, pp. 61 n. 1, 66 n. 1. In commenting on the comprehensiveness of Freeman's notes to the dispatches, one scholar has asserted that they "can stand alone as a condensed history of Lee's active command" (*DLB*, XVII, 160).

[59]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15 Sept. 1914.

Other technical difficulties also troubled Freeman. In regard to the dispatches themselves, Freeman had determined it best to identify them by number instead of date; several of the dispatches had identical dates and might otherwise create confusion when cited as cross-references in the notes. Other points had to do with the typefaces to be used. Freeman stressed particularly that the text should be set in twelve point and the notes in eight. Although Freeman did not want to follow the "very ugly" style of italicizing book titles in the notes, he was overruled, apparently by the publishers.[60]

In later years, Freeman's lack of enthusiasm for James Longstreet, Lee's major postwar critic, was widely known. It was said, in fact, that the title page of the historian's personal copy of Longstreet's *From Manassas to Appomattox* bore the notation in Freeman's hand, "To count the number of lies, count the number of lines." Realizing that he lacked objectivity where Longstreet was concerned, Freeman asked De Renne to read carefully the passages of the introduction regarding the controversial Georgia general. Having spoken "somewhat frankly," if justifiably, he wished to leave to De Renne the "wisdom of the criticisms." What De Renne discovered, among other statements, was a phrase regarding Longstreet's "attacks of self-important dotage." The collector suggested that this, along with other passages, be modified or omitted. Freeman concurred, admitting the suggestion was "not only wise but . . . generous. My original was a little too savage."[61]

Ending his comments on the book proper, Freeman requested—if it was not presumptuous—to be given a chance "to have a look at the make-up before it is finally determined on." He then concluded, "I have already written at inexcusable length and find I must add another paragraph before I am done. This is to thank you once more for your forbearance with delays that may have seemed interminable. Physical debility that threatened to wreck me, the hard necessity of long hours' work to make bread and meat, grinding routine,—all these kept me back. But now that the work is finished, I must say that none could have been

[60]Ibid.

[61]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *A Gallery of Southerners* (Baton Rouge and London, 1982), pp. 185, 187; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15, 22 Sept. 1914; W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, [21 Sept. 1914]. Major reviews of the book, both North and South, commented that Longstreet had been treated fairly. See, for example, *New York Times Review of Books*, 27 June 1915; *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 5 Aug. 1915. For a recent critique of Freeman's handling of Longstreet in *R. E. Lee* and *Lee's Lieutenants*, see William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens, Ga., and London, 1987), pp. 174–78.

kinder than you. All that I have made bold to say . . . in the dedication is literally true."[62]

Although their similar scholarly temperaments and tastes had made disagreements between the dispatches' owner and their editor very rare, De Renne would not accommodate Freeman in the matter of the book's proposed dedication. It read as follows:

> To
> W. J. De Renne
> Master of Wormsloe
>
> My dear Mr. De Renne:
>
> If ever a book should be inscribed to a man this should be to you. Through years when others neglected Southern history, you preserved it. In days when others were too busy to save the annals of the South, you collected them. While others waited for the coming of some great Southern historian, you prepared the way for him. As I have turned the pages of your great Lee collection,—may I say it,—I have thanked Heaven that the South boasted a man rich enough and wise enough to own and preserve such treasures.
>
> We owe you a debt, sir, which one of the humblest of Southern historical writers cannot hope to pay, even in part, by inscribing to you a work you have made possible.
>
> But as it is, will you accept it as a token of esteem from
>
> Douglas Southall Freeman[63]

De Renne's comment on this dedicatory epistle was apt. He found it "too flattering. . . . [I]t jars very much with the real value and good sense of the rest of the book, and you certainly give me enough undeserved recognition in the introduction." Freeman was disappointed but acquiescent, noting that De Renne was "the court of appeals."[64]

Otherwise, De Renne's response to the long-awaited typescript was positive and full of praise. Congratulating Freeman on the entire work, he noted especially the "explicit and forcible" introduction and admitted that the notes had required "more work than [he] supposed, giving as they do full explanations to each dispatch."[65]

---

[62]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15 Sept. 1914.

[63]Enclosure to Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 15 Sept. 1914.

[64]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, [21 Sept. 1914]; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 22 Sept. 1914. In the introduction Freeman described De Renne as "an historian and collector to whose patient and discriminating labor the South owes a debt not yet fully appreciated. . . . The editor could but hope that the future of Southern history were in the keeping of men like Mr. De Renne who combine means for publication with reverent regard for historical accuracy" (*Lee's Dispatches*, pp. xxxv, xxxvii–xxxviii).

[65]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, [21 Sept. 1914].

Courtesy of the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia

De Renne's library at Wormsloe was open to the "humblest individual who showed an interest in Georgia history." Among the treasures housed there were two bound volumes containing wartime correspondence and telegrams of R. E. Lee, which were published as *Lee's Dispatches.*

Freeman expressed himself "rejoiced to know that the editorial method pleases you." He acknowledged that he could have finished much more quickly (and have written as many notes in one night as he had in one week) had he substituted for "microscopic analysis the easier style of general notes," which he described with a tactical metaphor as "written in the air." In Freeman's estimation, the more comprehensive notes, with their abundant source citations, would be valuable to the research of both historians and the descendants of the men Lee had led.[66]

Ironically, the collaborators' exchange of congratulations was premature. Despite having waited four frustrating years as his dispatches were prepared for publication, De Renne faced yet another delay: in mid-

[66]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 22 Sept. 1914. As an indication of the proportion of notes to text, the compositor's calculations called for 462 pages, comprising 244 pages of text (11 point), 176 pages of notes (10 point), and 42 index pages (8 point). (Note the change in type sizes from Freeman's recommendations.) Bill for first impression of *Lee's Dispatches*, 31 May 1915. Fewer than twenty of the book's 358 pages of dispatches appeared without notes; three pages (62–64) were nothing but annotation.

October, in a letter appropriately dated the thirteenth, Edward Dodd reported to De Renne that upon reading the manuscript Dodd, Mead had determined that "it would not be wise . . . to undertake this book, interesting as it is."[67]

De Renne immediately relayed the disappointing news to Freeman. "Despite the unsettled condition of the book-market," Freeman responded, "your publishers' action is somewhat surprising. The widespread interest in military matters at this time and the remarkable similarity of some of Lee's campaigns to those of Joffre render this a peculiarly suitable season for the publication of letters from the great Confederate commander."[68] Freeman suggested approaching G. P. Putnam's Sons, which printed "more of this kind of work than any other American house."[69]

Two weeks later De Renne informed Freeman that Putnam's would publish the book—entirely at the Georgian's expense. He had directed that the proofs be sent to Freeman for correction, and he asked Freeman to write two brief descriptions of the book for catalog and advertising purposes.[70]

Putnam's had not been willing to finance the publication of the book themselves. "Our judgment," they explained to De Renne, "is adverse to the probability of securing for the proposed volume a sufficiently extended sale to render the publication remunerative." The firm nonetheless offered a fairly attractive proposition. Their estimate for producing five hundred copies of the book "in dignified and suitable form" to De Renne's and Freeman's specifications was a little over $1,000. Subsequent impressions of five hundred copies using the same plates would cost only about $300. Of those copies left in Putnam's hands for sale, the publishers would "render account [to De Renne] as the books sold, at fifty percent of the catalogue price" of $3.75, keeping "as their publishing

---

[67]Edward Dodd to W. J. De Renne, 13 Oct. 1914.

[68]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 17 Oct. 1914. Marshal Joseph Jacques Césaire Joffre, commander-in-chief of the French army on the Western Front (1914–16), had recently won fame leading his outnumbered army to victory at the Marne. In his newspaper commentaries during both world wars, Freeman often compared twentieth-century battles to those Lee had waged (Malone, "Pen of Freeman," p. xv; Kilpatrick, "Freeman," p. 8).

[69]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 17 Oct. 1914. Freeman's phrase "this kind of work" referred not to Civil War history, of which Putnam's had printed relatively little (just over two dozen books, with few qualifying as Confederate history), but to edited volumes of the papers of famous American figures. The firm had published multivolume editions of the writings of such eminent Virginians as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe (Allan Nevins et al., eds., *Civil War Books: A Critical Bibliography* [2 vols.; Baton Rouge, 1967]; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the Virginian*, in *Jefferson and His Time*, I [Boston, 1948], pp. 460, 463–64).

[70]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 30 Oct. 1914.

commission the difference between this fifty percent and the net price."[71]

By the time the contract was signed on 30 October 1914, the expense of publication had increased because of extras stipulated by De Renne. He had decided to switch to a larger size of type for the footnotes, which added pages to the volume, and also changed the frontispiece from a halftone to the more expensive photogravure. In addition the map, previously planned to be page-size, was expanded to a 12 1/2 by 17–inch pull-out, with march routes printed in red.[72]

De Renne seemed less disturbed by having to subsidize the book's publication than by the 1915 publication date. "If the book could have appeared in London on King Edward's death or on King George's coronation [May 1910 and June 1911, respectively]," he declared, "it would have been bought in large numbers by British officers & scattered to the four corners of the earth. Now the new war interests everyone to the exclusion of all other matters."[73]

In writing to Freeman regarding the contract with Putnam's, De Renne also enclosed a check for $1,000 "to compensate . . . in some measure for the time . . . devoted to the work." Although he realized that the young historian had labored "con amore & not for gain," De Renne knew that Freeman "could ill afford" the time expended. "Allow me," he ended, "to contribute my mite to the work."[74]

Freeman's response was obviously heartfelt. "It is useless for me to attempt to express the feelings with which I received your letter," he wrote.

> I am afraid if I attempted the task, you would not understand what I meant. Only a man who has fought his stubborn way in letters and has grappled with the wolf on the very threshold of his home can understand what a thousand dollars means. It is more money than I ever had in my life and it is to be put away to lay the foundations of a house for me and mine. Perhaps I can best express my thanks by saying that I could never never, perhaps, have hoped to own a home had it not been for this money.[75]

Aside from this expression of gratitude, Freeman also attended to some business in the letter. He advised excluding the word "confidential" from

---

[71]G. P. Putnam's Sons to W. J. De Renne, 21, 29 Oct. 1914, with estimate of 28 Oct. 1914. In comparison, De Renne had paid just over $1,000 to the Morning News Press for publishing two hundred copies of his 1911 catalog, a paperbound quarto of less than three hundred pages, illustrated by thirty-five plates (bill dated 1 Apr. 1911; Wymberley Jones De Renne, *Books Relating to the History of Georgia* [Savannah, 1911]).

[72]G. P. Putnam's Sons to W. J. De Renne, 29, 30 Oct. 1914.

[73]W. J. De Renne to Douglas Southall Freeman, 30 Oct. 1914.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 4 Nov. 1914.

the book's title, for although some dispatches were "marked 'confidential,' most of them were merely official."[76] The change was made on the title page but not on the book's spine.

Freeman enclosed the descriptions of the book he had written for Putnam's. One of them, a brief paragraph used in the publishers' "Fall Announcements," was later printed on the front of the book's jacket and also appeared in an advertising circular. It is significant both for the way in which Freeman attracts the reader's attention and as a concise overview of what the editor saw as the book's most important and exciting revelations:

> Should 'Stonewall' Jackson have assumed the offensive and invaded Pennsylvania after his famous valley campaign? Should the charge of Pickett's division have been ordered? Who was responsible for the failure of that bloody day? Was it safe to remove Johnston and to place Hood at the head of the army facing Sherman? How soon was the true objective of Grant's famous 'left flank' movement discovered by his great opponent? Why did Lee order the costly assault on Fort Stedman? These and many other questions—the most vital in the military history of the war—are asked and answered by General Lee himself in this striking contribution to the literature of the war.[77]

One other matter relating to the book Freeman considered extremely important: he hoped that a "well-qualified person" would prepare the index. He suggested that it was essential "to index the notes in the same alphabet with the text index" and suggested as a model the index of James D. Richardson's *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, "one of the best indexed books I know."[78]

"Do not fail to call on me," Freeman concluded, "and believe me when I say that no association of my life has been more pleasant than that which marked the editing of this book. Would that all patrons of letters were like yourself: there would then be no Grub Street."[79]

So the ordeal was all but over. Before Christmas 1914, Freeman finished the galleys and complimented Putnam's on the carefulness of their proofreaders. By March 1915, when the page proofs were corrected

---

[76]Ibid.

[77]Advertising circular for *Lee's Dispatches* in the scrapbook "Lee Letters: Newspaper Clippings," De Renne Papers. This book, apparently maintained by De Renne himself, contains reviews of the Lee book sent by several clipping bureaus.

[78]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 4 Nov. 1914. The book was indexed by Putnam's at a cost of $87.00 (bill for first impression of *Lee's Dispatches*, 31 May 1915).

[79]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 4 Nov. 1914. "Grub Street" was a byword for the literary hackwork on which some scholars had to depend for financial survival.

and returned, it was a matter of waiting for Putnam's to bring the project to its conclusion.[80]

De Renne did not wait patiently. He had hoped that the book would be out in early spring. Consequently, a communication he received from Putnam's in mid-May provided a seriocomic footnote to De Renne's trying experience. The firm's septuagenarian president, a Civil War veteran who signed himself "G. H. Putnam, Late Major, U.S. Vols.," noted that in Henry A. White's biography of Lee—which he had commissioned—an advertisement for a biography of Ulysses S. Grant had appeared. "It is our general idea," the major wrote, "that the citizens of the present generation who are interested in studying the characters of the leaders in the Civil War period would want to have before them the records of the leaders from both sides of the line." Consequently, he inquired whether De Renne would object to an ad for the letters of Grant appearing in *Lee's Dispatches*.[81]

Already displeased that his book had not been issued earlier in 1915—which "might have assured its success"—De Renne was in no mood to be amiable about any sort of tampering with his project, particularly when it involved a matter of taste. He responded, "I do not think that I could ever conciliate an advertisement, for no matter what reason, appearing in a book published by me. An advertisement included in a book takes away the dignity of the book as I look at it."[82]

A few weeks later De Renne at last held a copy of the book that was his brainchild. The stout octavo volume, bound in maroon cloth with the top page-edges gilded, more than satisfied him. "I congratulate you on the appearance of 'Lee's Dispatches,'" he wrote Putnam's. "The book is neat and complete in all details. The paper makes itself felt as you lift the volume. The different types are in proportion & easy to read. Altogether it is attractive and dignified."[83]

---

[80]Douglas Southall Freeman to G. P. Putnam's Sons, 22 Dec. 1914, Douglas Southall Freeman Papers; Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 4 Mar. 1915. For some errors that escaped Freeman and the proofreaders, see Carrol H. Quenzel, review of *Lee's Dispatches* (1957 ed.), in *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXV (1958), 370, and Joseph H. Harrison's review, cited in note 30, which criticized the 1957 edition for reproducing all errors "with canine fidelity."

[81]G. H. Putnam to W. J. De Renne, 11 May 1915. London-born George Haven Putnam (1844–1930) had recently published an autobiographical volume including his war experiences. In it he showed that he was also under Lee's spell. "If I had had the fortune to meet General Lee," he wrote, "my salute would have been both natural and heartfelt . . . , not merely for the magnificent defence that he had made under enormous discouragements and with a constant decrease in his resources, but for the exceptionally fine nature and character of the man" (George Haven Putnam, *Memories of My Youth, 1844–1865* [New York, 1914], p. 415).

[82]W. J. De Renne to G. H. Putnam, undated draft written on G. H. Putnam to W. J. De Renne, 11 May 1915.

[83]W. J. De Renne to G. P. Putnam's Sons, 4 June 1915.

The reviewers proved as impressed with the book's content as De Renne was with its appearance. The most significant of the early favorable reviews was that leading off the 27 June 1915 issue of the *New York Times Review of Books*. Hailing the book as "one of the literary surprises of the season," it stressed the volume's revelation of Lee's character, as Freeman and De Renne intended. The dispatches, noted the reviewer, "add still another cubit to [Lee's] moral stature. Nowhere, even when facing the bitter certainty of final surrender, does he pen a querulous sentence, a word of complaint, a breath of censure of anyone else."[84]

The article also praised the editor, both for his "valuable" introduction and the notes, which "bear witness to much patient research and are written with a good taste as unfailing as is the admiration they breathe for General Lee." In many other reviews the thirty-six-page introduction received warm praise, and one critic held that it alone was worth the price of the book. A remarkable piece of work, this "introductory monograph" demonstrated, even at this early date, Freeman's "familiarity with the general sweep of military history as well as his mastery of Confederate strategy and tactics." It was important also in the historian's development as a prose stylist, bridging as it did the period between the "purple prose" tendencies of his early days at Johns Hopkins and the spare, lucid prose of his Lee biography. The style is certainly more similar to that of *R. E. Lee* but is occasionally somewhat florid. One reviewer was reminded of Sir Walter Scott's "elaborate and painstaking style."[85]

Other reviews echoed praises for the editor while also expressing appreciation to De Renne for sharing his Lee collection with the public. The collection's mysterious history provoked fascinated discussion among the critics, for, in keeping with De Renne's wish for discretion, Freeman had not revealed the clue of Jones's previous ownership. Of the dispatches themselves, Freeman's introduction only surmised (correctly, as it happened) that they "were kept as a private file by Mr. Davis [and] were carried or sent South when Richmond fell."[86]

---

[84]"Lee Letters: Newspaper Clippings"; "Unpublished Dispatches from Gen. Lee," *New York Times Review of Books*, 27 June 1915.

[85]*New York Times Review of Books*, 27 June 1915; George L. Christian, "General Lee's Dispatches," *SHSP*, XLI (1916), 194; Wiley, "Lee to Davis, Tactfully," p. 5; Cheek, "Father as Writer," pp. 34–35; Joseph H. Harrison, review of *Lee's Dispatches* (1957 ed.), *VMHB*, LXVI (1958), 375; *Portland Sunday Oregonian*, 12 Sept. 1915.

[86]*Philadelphia Press*, 28 Aug. 1915; *Worcester Gazette*, 12 July 1915; *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 5 Aug. 1915; *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 Nov. 1915; *Lee's Dispatches*, p. xxxvii; Douglas Southall Freeman, *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History* (New York, 1939), pp. 96–101. Saved during the

Courtesy of the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia

De Renne bought the manuscript volumes of Lee's dispatches from Colonel Charles C. Jones, Jr., shown here in an 1885 photograph. Jones had borrowed the dispatches from Jefferson Davis's wartime private secretary and retained them through subterfuge.

As might have been expected, the dispatches relating to the ever-enthralling battle of Gettysburg received much attention in the reviewing columns. In one case, a reviewer printed in full dispatch no. 60, which Freeman regarded as "the most definite statement" by Lee on the Gettysburg campaign, as well as one of the most significant letters of the collection. Other reviewers commented on topics ranging from the cordial Lee-Davis relationship confirmed by the correspondence to the revelation of Lee's doubts over John Bell Hood's fitness to command the Army of Tennessee.[87]

---

evacuation of Richmond, a collection of manuscripts including the dispatches was loaned in 1870 to Jones by Burton N. Harrison, Davis's wartime private secretary. Through subterfuge Jones retained the Lee papers and later had them bound. Eventually he sold the volumes to De Renne, who never knew how Jones had procured them (Dallas D. Irvine, "The Fate of Confederate Archives," *AHR*, XLIV [1938–39], 825). See also William Harris Bragg, "Charles C. Jones, Jr., and the Mystery of Lee's Lost Dispatches," *Ga. Hist. Quar.*, LXXII (1988), 429–62.

[87]*Baltimore Sun*, 24 July 1915; *Lee's Dispatches*, p. vii; *New York Evening Post*, 11 Sept. 1915; *Brooklyn Eagle*, 26 June 1915; *New York Evening Sun*, 3 July 1915. Not until 1916 did relatively negative assessments emerge. Eben Swift, in a generally favorable review, charged Freeman with sometimes going "beyond the evidence" in placing blame on Lee's subordinates, as well as with using pejorative language in describing certain federal military operations. The most dismissive review appeared in the British periodical *Nation*, which called the book "disappointing," although "Freeman, in an elaborate introduction and in notes of portentous length, seeks to make good the deficiencies that the general reader must feel in these jejune records" (Eben Swift, review of *Lee's Dispatches*, in *AHR*, XXI [1915–16], 359; *Nation*, 8 Apr. 1916).

The critics' favorable reception of the book overjoyed Freeman, who wrote to congratulate De Renne "that the newspapers confirmed the judgment you expressed to me these years agone, that the Lee papers were valuable and deserved to be in print." Later he sent De Renne the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*'s long and enthusiastic review of the book, together with word of McCabe's assessment. The latter's opinion should interest De Renne, Freeman wrote, "especially as the very extravagant praise he gives the book comes from the literary executor of both General Lee's sons."[88]

Freeman added a wish that, considering the book's good press, De Renne would "upset all historical precedents and actually make some money" from *Lee's Dispatches*. The book sold well enough that a second impression of 514 copies joined the 506 originally published. On paper De Renne did make some money; royalty payments through 31 January 1918, representing the sale of 564 books, totaled almost $600 after deduction of expenses. De Renne's prepublication costs, however, including the sum paid to Freeman, were about $1,500, and the expense of publishing over one thousand books approached $2,000.[89]

De Renne, of course, had financed the project to honor Lee and spread the general's fame, not to make money. And, although the critical applause was gratifying to him, the reaction of a narrow segment of the reading public was even more important: the response of those to whom he sent presentation copies of the book. Grateful recipients—from university presidents to historians and archivists—wrote letters of appreciation. One letter, from Rome, Italy, must have been especially satisfying to De Renne. It came from his cousin Lillie Noble Jones, a grand and regal lady who had lived abroad for years but had known many of the major figures of the Civil War, both North and South. She enclosed with her letter a copy of the "last photo taken of Gen Lee, 'in gray,'" given to her by the general's daughter Mildred.[90]

"'Lee's Dispatches' have arrived," she wrote, "& last night I read the admirable introduction & up to Gettysburg. How fortunate you were in

---

[88]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 2 July, 5 Aug. 1915.

[89]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 5 Aug. 1915; bill for first impression of *Lee's Dispatches*, 31 May 1915; bill for second impression of *Lee's Dispatches*, 26 Aug. 1915; statements of account, 31 July 1915, 31 Jan. 1916, 31 Jan. 1918. Unaccountably, the jacket copy for the 1957 edition of the book stated that only 750 copies of the first edition were printed.

[90]"Personal Comments on Lee Letters" [scrapbook], De Renne Papers; Lillie Noble Jones to W. J. De Renne, 6 Aug. [1915]. Lillie Noble Jones (1840–1925) acted as hostess in Rome for her brother, the diplomat Wallace Savage Jones, and is buried in Rome's English cemetery (Muriel Barrow Bell to author, 12 Apr. 1987).

your selection of Mr. Freeman! How well he writes, & how competently, & how he loves Gen Lee!" The ultimate compliment followed. "The book is worthy of the De Renne collection & I am sure your Father would have approved of the paper, print, binding. It must prove a success."[91]

The book's editor also sent thanks for his presentation copy.

> You are a modest man, [Freeman wrote] who declines compliments and spurns flattery. But now that you are reading and cannot stop me from saying it, I must tell you that the South owes a debt to you for the reverent manner in which you have handled the precious correspondence of our great chieftain. Have you noticed—of course you have—that all the reviewers emphasize the very point you made in your talk to me about the letters the day on Lake Champlain—that . . . they were worth publishing for the light they threw on the man?
>
> Personally I owe a debt that could not be paid you if I had done a piece of editorial work that would be a classic. I am in your debt because, in a sense, you have enabled me to pay a debt. You will pardon me if it sound sentimental, but we have in Richmond near my house a very handsome statue of General Lee—it is the Mercié, the best I think. I walk by it almost daily and I confess that for years I have felt like apologizing for never having done anything to perpetuate the fame of that great man. But now, thanks to you, I can walk by the statue and say to myself, 'I'm not the man he would have Southerners be, but thank God, I've done a little something to keep alive his fame!' That was my debt: you have enabled me to pay it, in part at least.[92]

In the years to come, of course, Freeman's debt to Lee would be repaid many times over. But De Renne would know nothing of it. On 23 June 1916, less than a year after receiving Freeman's letter, W. J. De Renne died in his suite at the Hotel Netherland in Manhattan from diabetes and accompanying complications. His body was returned to Georgia and placed in the family vault in Savannah's Bonaventure Cemetery. His funeral service was conducted where he had wished it to be—in the library at Wormsloe, among all his treasures. De Renne's collection lives on at the University of Georgia, where it is housed in the rare books department of the university library. Moreover, through the university's press, books of distinction are still being published with the Wormsloe imprint.[93]

---

[91]Lillie Noble Jones to W. J. De Renne, 6 Aug. [1915].

[92]Douglas Southall Freeman to W. J. De Renne, 2 July 1915.

[93]"W. J. De Renne Dies in New York," *Savannah Morning News*, 24 June 1916; death certificate of Wymberley Jones De Renne, Bureau of Vital Records, New York, N.Y.; Coulter, *Wormsloe*, pp. vii, 253, 288 n. 26. Lee's bound dispatches were not included in the university's purchase of the De Renne collection. The telegram volume was sold to Duke University; the letter volume was broken up and sold to collectors. The

Freeman's excellent work for De Renne as editor of the Lee dispatches was soon noticed in places beyond the reviewing columns. In late November 1915 the young historian received a letter from E. L. Burlingame, of Charles Scribner's Sons. The firm was considering publishing a series of biographies of "American figures of conspicuous interest historically or individually." Would Freeman "consider contributing a life of General Lee?"[94]

Freeman, of course, was more than interested. Two decades would pass, however, before the unveiling of *R. E. Lee*—his and Lee's monument, a monument that in one sense was built upon two splendidly bound volumes of three-quarter morocco.[95]

majority of the letters are now in the Virginia State Library and Archives, a gift of Bernard Baruch (Henry Putney Beers, *Guide to the Archives of the Confederate States of America* [Washington, D.C., 1968], p. 67).

[94]E. L. Burlingame to Douglas Southall Freeman, 22 Nov. 1915, Scribner Author Files, Princeton University Library, Princeton. Burlingame, bargaining for a 75,000-word book for Scribner's Figures in American History series, became editor of Freeman's ever-expanding magnum opus but died halfway through the project (Berg, *Max Perkins*, p. 76). See also Cheek, "Reflections," p. 29.

[95]Douglas Southall Freeman to E. L. Burlingame, 24 Nov. 1915, Scribner Author Files. A few years after Freeman's death, Putnam's decided to reissue *Lee's Dispatches*, adding whatever uncollected letters and telegrams could be found. David Herbert Donald, whom the publishers approached regarding this new edition, recommended his former student Grady McWhiney for the task. Having searched the collections of several institutions, McWhiney was able to append eleven previously unpublished dispatches. This new edition was supplanted, in terms of comprehensiveness, four years later by *The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, edited by Clifford Dowdey and Louis Manarin. This collection contained a generous selection of the entire range of Lee's wartime correspondence, offering over one thousand personal, official, and confidential communications. Of the dispatches published by De Renne, almost two-thirds were deleted (*Lee's Dispatches*, new edition, with additional dispatches and foreword by Grady McWhiney [New York, 1957], new material: pp. v–x, 361–75; telephone conversation with Grady McWhiney, 18 Mar. 1987; Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee* [Boston and Toronto, 1961]).